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Dear Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Jessica DeJesus. I have been working for Natchaug Hospital for the past six years. I am a mental health worker at our main hospital and currently work at our hospital Pediatric Unit. As an employee of Natchaug Hospital I am directly effected by the state's funding of our services. My co-workers and I want the community we serve to have access to quality services and that workers have the ability to provide for themselves and their families.

I appreciate the intent of Bill 6947, and support the concept. I am here today to discuss the concerns regarding setting reimbursement rates for the private sector providers. The state needs to take into account the true cost of providing services when determining reimbursement rates to agencies. This cost includes hiring, training, and

maintaining a qualified team of employees. My agency needs to staff the facility in a way that everyone is safe, including the persons receiving the care and those providing it. Over the years my co-workers and I have negotiated and made gains in our wages and benefits. We need to ensure that the evaluation of the reimbursement rate doesn't erode the ability for care-givers to have a quality standard of living.

I am requesting that the reimbursement rate include a minimum of \$15 per hour starting rate for all direct care workers in the non-profit sector, as well as funding for a 4.5% Cost of Living for each year of the budget. Lastly, to review the true cost of providing these services that ensures access to quality care and maintains that those who provide the services may also be able to provide for themselves and their families.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today and understanding the importance of the work we do and the value it has on our communities.